

The Standard Bearer

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Rivers of Living Water

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

John 7:37-39

Just a few days from the date of this publication the Reformed churches that are governed by the Church Order of Dordt will observe Pentecost.

Pentecost is a day of great significance for the church. It was on Pentecost that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church. Notice the timeline. Jesus was crucified on the Jewish Passover, which was a Friday. Three days later, on Sunday, He arose from the grave. Forty days after His resurrection, on a Thursday, He ascended into heaven. And ten days later (fifty days after His resurrection and once again on a Sunday), on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, Jesus poured out

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the Spirit on the church. This was the culmination of all the works of Christ prior to that point. Jesus died, arose, and ascended exactly so that He could pour out the Holy Spirit.

Jesus spoke of this great event earlier in His ministry while in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. During the course of this week-long feast the question of Jesus' identity was much discussed, specifically whether He was the Messiah. The leaders sought to discredit Him. The people were divided in their opinion. On the last day of the feast, Jesus announced that He had living water for those who were thirsty. Those who would come to Him would overflow with this living water. John, the holy writer, adds by way of explanation that Jesus spoke this concerning the Spirit, which those who believe on Him would receive. This Spirit is the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost.



Let's return to the Feast of Tabernacles. This was the last of the three great feasts of the Jewish calendar. It was held in the seventh month of the year, and lasted for seven days. This feast served a twofold purpose. First, it was a harvest feast, celebrating the ingathering of olive yards and vineyards. But it also was designed

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to commemorate Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. To commemorate Israel's wilderness wanderings, the people lived in booths made of branches during the week of this feast, symbolizing Israel's living in tents or tabernacles. This is how this feast received its name—Feast of Tabernacles. Twice on each day of the feast a golden vessel was filled with water from the pool of Siloam and poured into the base of the great altar of burnt offering in the temple. This was a reminder of God's provision of providing water from the rock for Israel in the wilderness.

Now let's go to the last day of this feast. It was on this day that Jesus stood in the temple and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Jesus most likely spoke this in connection with the pouring out of water on the base of the great altar in the temple. As we have already seen, this ceremony was a reminder of God's provision of water from the rock for Israel in the wilderness. And for that reason it also pointed forward to the spiritual bounties that would come to Israel with the promised Messiah. From earliest times true Israel understood that the water from the wilderness rock was a type or picture of the greater spiritual blessings that would come with the appearance of the Messiah and that would sustain them to eternal life. In the minds of Israel were passages of Scripture like Isaiah 12:3: "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." This was a prophecy of what would happen when the promised Messiah would come. Some even think that this passage served as a basis for the ceremony of pouring water at the base of the altar on this particular feast.

It is in the light of all this that we are to understand the remarkable statement of Jesus.

He meant, first, that He is the Messiah, the Christ, who had living waters of salvation for Israel that would sustain them to eternal life.

Secondly, Jesus indicated that He would impart these waters of salvation to those who would come to Him and drink. From Jesus' own words it becomes evident that to come and drink is to believe on Him. ("If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

He that believeth on me...") This believing consists in acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, the only source of salvation. It also consists in seeking salvation in His work alone, relying upon Him for all things.

Finally, Jesus indicated that rivers of living water shall flow out of the belly of those that come to Him in faith. This reminds us of what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well in John 4:14: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." The idea expressed there is of a well of water bubbling up constantly to give eternal life. This certainly is implied in Jesus' words spoken in the temple. But Jesus goes beyond this idea to speak of an overflowing water source that even sends rivers of water flowing out of one to bring life to others around him. This is what would be given to those who come to Jesus in faith.

To add credibility to what He said, Jesus indicated that this was nothing more than what the Old Testament Scriptures taught. You will not find these words of Jesus in the Old Testament; nor does Jesus indicate that He was quoting the Scriptures. Yet the idea of finding abundant waters in the Savior is found throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. One such passage is Isaiah 44:3: "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring."



From what John, the holy writer, adds by way of explanation it becomes clear that what Jesus promised became a reality through the Spirit, whom Jesus poured out at Pentecost.

Notice that in his commentary on Jesus' outcry, John speaks of the Holy Spirit. "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified."

John indicates that the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified. In the original you simply read, the Holy Spirit was not yet. The word "given" in our KJV is added by way of commentary. Others would substitute the word "present." The Holy

Spirit was not yet *present*. Perhaps it is better to add no explanation and let the original stand: The Holy Spirit was not yet.

The meaning, of course, is not that the Holy Spirit *was not*, in any sense of the word, until Jesus' glorification. The Holy Spirit is eternally God, the third person of the Godhead, proceeding from the Father and the Son. The meaning is rather that the Holy Spirit was not yet in His capacity as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures speak several times of the Spirit of Christ. This is the Holy Spirit given to Christ at His ascension and glorification for the purpose of applying the blessings of salvation to the church. This capacity the Holy Spirit did not yet have at the time of this incident. In that sense the Holy Spirit was not. And the reason is that Jesus was not yet glorified.

Since the time that Jesus spoke these things in the temple, He has been glorified. He was glorified at His ascension. His glorification consisted of His being crowned Lord of lords and given power over all things. He was blessed with all the blessings of salvation that He earned at the cross for the church. It is Jesus' work, as the Lord of all glory, to bestow the riches of salvation upon the church. To this end the Holy Spirit was given to Him.

On Pentecost Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ into the church. Certainly the Holy Spirit was operative in the lives of the believers of the Old Testament, bestowing the blessings of salvation. But now that Jesus has been glorified with the blessings of the cross, the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ brings the full measure of salvation, so that the believer overflows with heavenly blessings.

This is the significance of Pentecost.

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost fulfills Jesus' promise to him who in faith comes to Him and drinks. Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

Notice that Jesus spoke of living water. Living water

is life-giving and life-sustaining water. This life-giving water is the Holy Spirit. The life that the Spirit imparts is eternal life with God, a joyous life of friendship and fellowship with the ever-blessed God. The believer who comes to Jesus to partake of His blessings will receive this life-giving Spirit. By the work of the Holy Spirit the believer will be justified and sanctified in Christ and brought into a wonderful life of fellowship with God.

Jesus also spoke of giving living waters in such abundance to the believer that rivers of living water would even flow from his belly to bring life to others. This is realized when the believer is so filled with the Spirit and His fruits that others around him are brought to faith in Jesus Christ and receive the Spirit of God and His blessings. The church that is filled with such believers is led by the Spirit to preach the gospel and bear witness to others of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The church of Spirit-filled believers is also filled with good works that show forth the power of God's gracious salvation. These are what the Spirit uses to bring others to faith and life with God.



If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.

Those who thirst have an intense desire for the living waters of salvation. Not all men are spiritually thirsty.

The natural man has no such thirst. Spiritual thirst is created in the hearts of God's elect by the Spirit Himself. And He uses the preaching and the witness of the church whose members are filled with the rivers of living water to create such a thirst.


Jesus calls all thirsty souls to come to Him and drink of the waters of life.

Jesus also gives assurance. He who comes by faith shall be

satisfied with the waters of eternal life. None will leave thirsty. Out of his belly will flow rivers of living water.

Let us come to Jesus in faith to drink deeply of the water of life!

Let us come not just once, but daily!

Out of your belly will flow rivers of living water. 

*The pouring out
of the Holy Spirit
on Pentecost
fulfills Jesus' promise
to him who in faith
comes to Him and drinks.*

“These Are Exciting Times” — The Agenda for Synod 2013

The title of this editorial is lifted from a report to the Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches set to meet in June of 2013. The full sentence reads: “These are exciting times, and God has given us also a powerful way to extend our distinctive message to the ends of the earth.” The report happens to be that of the Reformed Witness Hour Committee, but the clause could have appeared in any number of reports to synod. It captured what I felt as I read the agenda of synod. Excitement. Let me show you why in this preview of synod’s agenda.

Domestic Missions

The main work of the Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) is in Pittsburgh and the surrounding area, where missionary Rev. Bruinsma and his wife live and work. Obviously, the welfare of a mission field is heavily dependent on a missionary (and family). Rev. Bruinsma reports not only on his labors (extensive and energetic), but also on his observations on the work generally. Some of his reflections we share:

Domestic missions is not what it used to be. In the past we were able to keep ourselves busy with

small groups of people who asked us to come and help them. These groups consisted of people who were already of a Reformed background, had a certain knowledge of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, and understood what it meant to be committed to a church and its ordinances. This is not true of domestic missions anymore today. We live in a society rife with unbelief and an ecclesiastical world void of scriptural knowledge....

Not in the least discouraged, Missionary Bruinsma continues:

This does not mean the church today may become remiss in her calling to preach the gospel both in far-off lands and to the dispersed of our own land. Preaching the gospel outside the confines of the instituted church is as important and urgent as preaching that gospel within. We must always and ever call to faith and repentance and we must do that “to all persons promiscuously and without distinction.”

And he assures synod, “We have by God’s grace continued to preach the gospel in Pittsburgh.”

Preaching is the heart of the work in Pittsburgh, as it must be. The report of the DMC indicates

that it includes Heidelberg Catechism preaching, and that it is supported by catechism classes for the youth, doctrine classes for adults, lectures, and conferences. The missionary and the DMC give a good report of the activities of the missionary and the group in Pittsburgh, good encouragement and involvement by the DMC and the calling church (Southwest PRC). They are innovative and long thinking, also in their outreach to the areas surrounding Pittsburgh.

The DMC’s efforts to encourage home missions include development of the web site and offering assistance to evangelism committees/societies of local congregations in the hope that their efforts will develop into a denominational work. I, for one, pray their efforts are fruitful, and that the Lord of the harvest will open doors to enable the PRC to call additional domestic missionaries.

Reformed Witness Hour

The Reformed Witness Hour (RWH) Committee is not a standing committee of the PRC, but is rather a committee historically under the consistory of First PRC in Grand Rapids. Thus it does its fine work at almost no cost to the denomination (officially) but is sup-

ported primarily by contributions and church collections. It cooperates with our DMC to broadcast in places where the DMC has interest in mission work. The RWH Committee reports that currently the RWH is broadcast on eighteen stations in the US and Canada, as well as in Northern Ireland and the Philippines. They continue to add stations as requests come in.

Their excitement for the work shines through when they describe a new facet of their broadcasting, namely, the Internet. They report tens of thousands of visits and downloads on their website (www.reformedwitness.org) and Sermon Audio.

Important as the *media* may be, however, it is especially the *message* that invigorates this committee. They write:

We are not simply “another voice” on the airwaves and on the Internet, even in terms of the Reformed faith. Ours is a *distinctive* Reformed radio and Internet program, on which we proclaim our distinctive doctrines of sovereign, particular grace and an unconditional covenant. But besides proclaiming these distinctive truths, we also are becoming more and more distinct with our teachings on creation, on marriage and family, and on the Christian life. The Lord has given us a clear and certain sound to herald in these last days, and we are committed to staying faithful to this pure, biblical doctrine.

Foreign Missions

The main work of the Protestant Reformed Churches in foreign mission continues to be in the Philip-

pinas. The reports of the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC), Doon’s consistory, and the missionaries all reflect the godly excitement they experience in their work. First, they rejoice in the return of Vernon Ibe to the field and his ordination into the ministry. Rev. Ibe has accepted the call from the Berean PRC in Manila and is capably doing the preaching and the pastoral work in the congregation. The missionaries also appreciate his assistance because Rev. Ibe can speak and preach fluently in Tagalog.

*We cannot
thank God enough
for His blessing
on these zealous labors!*

Some may have wondered about the need for two missionaries in the Philippines, what with Rev. Ibe’s return. Anyone who reads the reports will have all doubts removed about that. God has given Missionaries Smit and Kleyn many contacts and opportunities to expand their labors. Currently they preach in five different locations as they are able. In various places and to various groups they teach catechism classes and Reformed doctrine classes for membership. In addition they hold seminary-like classes for area ministers on doctrine, sermon-making (homiletics), and interpreting Scripture (hermeneutics).

Then consider that their nearest group is forty-five minutes away, and the farthest is a five-hour drive.

Besides, they are regularly and carefully working with various churches and ministers with a view to forming (in God’s good time) a denomination of churches devoted to the Reformed truth that the Berean Church already wholeheartedly embraced as taught in the Reformed confessions and interpreted in the Declaration of Principles.

We cannot thank God enough for His blessing on these zealous labors!

Contact with Other Churches

The Committee for Contact with Other Churches (CC) reports on various work that it is privileged to do on behalf of the churches in obedience to the Lord’s command to manifest the unity of the body of Christ in the truth. The CC reports on correspondence with the Evangelical Churches of Australia, on the visit of synodically-commissioned observers to NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council), as well as a visit of two members to the Confessing Protestant-Reformed Congregation in Giessen, Germany in the last year. Discussions continue with the congregation in Giessen on matters of doctrine and practice, and some progress is reported.

There is, without question, special joy when God gives the Protestant Reformed Churches opportunity to experience the closeness of sister-church relations with the church of Christ in a distant land,

and the CC's report indicates that. The relationship with the Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland continues to abide strong, and with obvious mutual appreciation. The congregation in Northern Ireland and her mission in the Republic of Ireland (Limerick) maintain a bold yet winsome witness to the Reformed faith in the British Isles and into Europe. A better ally in the battle of faith one could hardly find. We rejoice that CPRC NI is sending Elder Reid as a delegate to synod this year.

The bond of fellowship with our sister church in Singapore is certainly not a merely formal relationship. With much joy the CC (officially) reports to the synod that Rev. Andy Lanning has accepted the call to be the minister-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore (CERC). To the surprise of none, Rev. Lanning is well received in CERC, and he and his wife Stephanie and their five children are adjusting well in their new land. They report that they are determined to labor there as long as the Lord wills. CERC is looking at the government regulations with which they must comply in order to call Rev. Lanning as their pastor in the next year and a half or so.

A historic event in our relationship occurred this spring with the visit of Rev. Koole and Elder Tom Bodbyl to CERC, when they, among other activities, conducted church visitation. The session of CERC requested church visitation because they understood that such a visit is not a ruling over, but a part

of good mutual oversight inherent in Reformed church polity. As Southeast PRC and Grandville PRC, as Hope Redlands and Lynden, so the PRC and CERC have a responsibility to each other. The CC asks synod's approval for church visitation to be done yearly, as it is with the congregation in Northern Ireland. Plans are for CERC to send a delegate to synod as well. These are exciting times.

A Special Report

Synod 2012 instructed the DMC and the FMC to form a joint study committee to examine seven specific matters of their constitutions having to do with the calling and continued labors of missionaries (confer Acts of 2012, Art. 58). The committee brings three recommendations. Synod will need to judge whether the committee has satisfactorily addressed all the concerns. Of particular concern to the delegates of 2012 was the fifth point, "Whether there should be a way to terminate a man's calling as missionary in addition to the ways specified in the Church Order." The answer of the committee is, "yes."

Theological School Committee

Another year draws to a close in the Theological Seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Theological School Committee (TSC), appointed by synod to oversee the seminary, reports of God's blessing on the instruction. This is the eighty-eighth year of instruction in which God has preserved the seminary as a defender

and teacher of the Reformed faith. God continues to give the seminary young men, capable, godly young men, committed to be faithful preachers and pastors in the church of Jesus Christ. Nine young men are applying for entrance to the seminary in the fall, one of whom comes from our sister church in Singapore, and the rest from the PRC.


With joy the TSC reports that one student, Mr. Erik Guichelaar, son of the Wingham congregation, is recommended by the faculty for examination at the synod. The Lord willing, the churches will have another minister of the Word and Sacraments installed into office before the end of the year.



The times are exciting for the Protestant Reformed Churches. The blessings are abundant. This is far from a comprehensive summary—it merely highlights some of the reports.

Come to synod to catch some of the excitement, if you are able. This is not the fleeting excitement of a game-winning touchdown, a grand-slam homer, or a buzzer-beating basket. Rather, it is the excitement of seeing the Lord working in and through a branch of His church. You will see that the work is done not only orderly and carefully but also enthusiastically. The delegates are very willing to give of their time, perhaps vacation time, to do the work that Christ gives His church. Delegates of sister churches come from the other side of the Atlantic or the Pacific. You do not want to miss them.

Come to listen, to evaluate, to appreciate the wisdom in a multitude of counselors and the wisdom that the Spirit gives to the delegates. An abbreviated schedule is given below. If you cannot come, yet pray for the blessing of the Lord Jesus, the King of His church. Except the Lord build the house....

All events in Hudsonville PRC [5101 Beechtree St., Hudsonville, MI]
Monday, June 10, 7:00 P.M., Pre-Synodical Service.
Tuesday, June 11, 8:30 A.M.
Synod convenes; Mr. Guichelaar gives his sermon that morning.
Wednesday, June 12, 8:30 A.M.
The oral examination of Mr. Guichelaar begins.
Thursday, June 13, 7:30 P.M.
Seminary Commencement; Speaker: Prof. Gritters. 

○ COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

Hear Ye Him! The Reading and Preaching of Scripture in Worship (4)

And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Revelation 4:2, 9-11

Introduction

In our series on Reformed worship, we have moved beyond principle to an examination of the elements of corporate worship as they are carried out according to the principles of God's Word. We first examined the aspects of the "opening service," where God ushers us into His presence. Currently, we are studying the heart of the covenantal meeting between God and His people, the reading and preaching of Scripture. The ministry of the Word is the heart of the worship

service. Here, God speaks to us as our King and Father in the covenant of grace. We discussed last time the necessity and importance of this aspect of the worship service. Now we examine the carrying out of the reading and preaching of Scripture and the relationship of these elements to all worship.

The Elements Carried Out

If the ministry of the Word is going to be God Himself speaking to us, it must be a faithful reading and faithful exposition of that Word. Only when the Word has its say does the ministry of the Word come with the authority of God Himself to His people. Then it is not the minister who makes exhortations; it is not the minister's doctrine being taught; it is not the minister giving encouragement, it is God in Christ who speaks these things.

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra and the people understood this. That is why the message Ezra and the Levites brought to the people was not their own message, but an exposition of Scripture—the words of God. We have in Nehemiah 8 an example of expository preaching in a public worship service. All the people of Israel are gathered in Jerusalem; a massive crowd is there to worship the Lord. Ezra stands up and reads the law in verses 3-4. And then, in verses 7-8, the Levites and 13 priests

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Previous article in this series: March 1, 2013, p. 260.

“caused the people to understand the law. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” Ezra read a portion, and then the other men, whom you can be sure were trained by Ezra, went around through the crowds and expounded that portion of the Word. They “gave the sense,” or explained what it meant and applied it to the people. Then Ezra read more, and they explained that portion to the people, so that they caused the people to understand.

This is what true preaching is and must be. It must take a portion of God’s Word and give the sense, that is, expound it and apply it. Therefore, the preaching must not be the minister’s own agenda, but the Word of God Himself faithfully expounded. The minister is an exegete of Scripture. The word “exegete” means “to lead out of.” This is what the minister must do. The content of the sermon is what he has led out of the Word, so that it is God in His Word speaking to the people. At the end of the sermon the people ought to be able to say, “I now know what that passage of Scripture means and how it applies to my life. I know what God has to say to me in that passage.” The people ought also to understand that the preaching they heard, if it was faithful, was God’s Word coming to them, not the minister’s.

If the ministry of the Word is to be authoritative, the sermon must come from someone who is trained and has the gifts to understand and expound the Word of God. He must be someone who has been taught the Word of God and its principles of interpretation, as were the Levites who preached in Nehemiah 8. He must be someone whom the church recognizes as having these abilities, and therefore someone the church *calls* to expound the Word. It must be this way because the congregation needs to hear God’s voice in His Word. The church therefore does not put someone upon the pulpit who cannot give the sense of the Word of God.

At Jesus’ transfiguration God declared publicly, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” When the preaching of the Word is faithful to the Word of God, God says the same thing: “Christ is speaking, hear Him.” That does not mean the minister turns into Jesus. It means that the Word

of God proclaimed is Christ’s Word. The authority is not merely in the minister himself (although the man in the office should be respected for his office), it is primarily in the Word of God. If the preaching is not faithful to the Word, God’s people not only *may*, but also *must* protest it (with a willingness to see that they might be wrong themselves and a willingness to submit to a multitude of counselors). But when the preaching is faithful to that Word, then God says, “You are hearing Christ My Son in those words. Hear Him, listen to Him.”

Do you listen to Him? Do you give Him your undivided attention? It really comes down to a matter of trust. Do you trust Him? If you do not trust a person speaking to you, he can talk all he wants but you will not listen. However, if you do trust the one speaking, but you do not listen, then you are a fool. Who is more trustworthy to interpret your life than Christ? Hear Him! God in Christ is speaking to us in His Word. Do not harden your heart against His words, but come prepared to hear Christ Himself speak to you—to receive comfort for the soul from Him, to receive correction from Him, to hear Him tell you that you are His. Why would we sleep or daydream, when we could be hearing the words of Christ to us? We must be actively involved in the sermon, giving our full attention to what is being said, following the argument carefully.

In addition, as we receive the Word with our heads, we must receive it also with our hearts. As our hearts receive the Word, we must praise God for it. There ought to be worship happening in the hearts of the people of God as they are under the ministry of the Word. In this way, there is a mini dialogue within the grand dialogue. As God speaks, our minds and hearts are attentive, and we respond in our souls as we receive the Word.

The Word Produces Worship

In God’s people the Word read and proclaimed produces worship. Really *all* of worship depends upon the reading and preaching of Scripture. First of all, all the other elements of worship depend upon the reading and preaching of Scripture being at the center of our life and worship. How can we sing and pray to a God we do not know? He must reveal Himself to us in His

Word. What motivation would we have to give to the Lord in the offering if He did not speak to us in His Word and declare His gospel of forgiving grace to us? What help is the law read to us in the service, if we do not know the God who gives it? If there is no gospel proclaimed to justify us, why would we worship at all, for the guilt of our sin would remain upon us? Even the call to worship, the salutation, and the benediction would be meaningless were it not for the reading and proclamation of Scripture. Who cares if we are being called to worship if we do not know the God who is calling us? We must know Him as His Word reveals Him.

But when Christ speaks to us in His Word week after week, then we can respond with song and prayer from the heart. This is what we see from Revelation 4. In this passage, John sees a vision of heaven after the church is redeemed. The saints are all together without sin, worshipping before the throne of God. In this vision, John sees God upon His throne. He is glorious. He is like a red sardius stone—a picture of His terrible wrath and justice. He is also like a jasper stone—a picture of His righteousness and purity. He has lightnings and thunderings and voices coming out of the throne, something that makes one think of God giving the law on Sinai—a picture again of His power and majesty and wisdom.

John sees the 24 elders gathered about this throne. Those 24 elders represent the whole church—the Old Testament 12 tribes of Israel, and the New Testament 12 apostles. Every elect believer is gathered there, and all the purified creation is there too. There are four beasts that represent all the different parts of God's creation. They have eyes all around their heads, and with all of them they are looking at God upon His throne. Together they cry out, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!" The church, represented by the 24 elders, worships Him as

well. Verses 10-11: "They fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power."

What is recorded here is the very definition of worship. First, the elders fall down before Him. That indicates absolute humility before God. When the wise men came to worship the baby Jesus, they fell down before Him. Falling down is saying that I am nothing, and Thou art everything. Second, the elders express their humble devotion, "Thou art worthy, O Lord." That is worship, recognizing the *worth* of God and praising Him for it. Third, the elders lay down their crowns, saying in effect, "Thou art worthy, and we are

not, and we place whatever worth we have before Thee at Thy throne."

But the question is, why do they fall down, and why do they lay their crowns at His feet, and why do they cry out that God is worthy? The answer is, because they *saw* Him. They saw Him in His majesty and glory, and seeing Him they knew they were noth-

ing and He was everything.

This is what happens in the proper preaching of God's Word, we see God upon His throne. In the Word, God communicates Himself to us, "This is who I am, the glorious, sovereign God." He declares His worth to our minds and hearts. And in the preaching of the Word He tells us who we are, nothing before Him, yet those whom He has loved and redeemed. O, how we need this! How quickly we lose sight of His glory and majesty! And how quickly we lose sight of our own unworthiness! We are self-deceivers. We need God to tell us who we are, specks of dust in this universe. We need God in His Word to tell us that apart from Him we are damn-worthy rebels. But we need God in His Word to tell us that we are damn-worthy rebels who are never apart from Him. We need to hear Him say we are a people cared for by the God of the universe, redeemed

*There ought to be
worship happening
in the hearts of the people of God
as they are under
the ministry of the Word.*

in the cross of Jesus Christ, and in Him elevated to a position of honor before God's throne.


It is this that makes us fall down before God and cry out, "Thou art worthy, O Lord!" Without regular preaching in our lives, we do not want to come to church for the purpose of worship. Without God's Word proclaimed regularly, we do not come to church with the desire in our hearts to fall down and exalt His worth. When we do not know Him and His plan of redemption in His Word, we come to church instead for the purpose of having it out with God. And when we do not know ourselves properly, we come to church with "why's" in our hearts instead of worship in our hearts.¹ "God is going to meet with his people? Good, because I have some questions for Him. Why is this happening in my life? Who does He think He is? What is He doing with all this trouble and suffering in this world?"

It is only when we know Him as He is in His Word, and it is only when, from His Word, we know ourselves as nothing in His sight yet redeemed by grace, that we come ready to fall down and worship. Then the "whys" go away. And even though we do not know all the answers, we can trust Him and simply worship, for He is God, and we are not. We can sing to Him of His sovereignty. We can sing to Him of appreciation for His love. We can pray to Him, thankful that this

¹ For this insight I am indebted to Dr. Henry Krabbendam. Krabbendam, Henry. "Worship and Preaching." *Worship in the Presence of God*. Ed. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman. Fellsmere, Florida: Reformation Media and Press, 2006. 157-177. Print.

majestic One is our Father. And we can turn all of our questions into the statement of the elders in verse 11: "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

The Believer's Attitude

Knowing this, what then ought to be our attitude toward the reading and preaching of the Word in the covenantal assembly? It ought to be the attitude of the Israelites in Nehemiah 8. First, we ought to be as attentive to it as they were. Nehemiah 8:4: "and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." Second, we ought to have a deep reverence for the Word and know the privilege it is to hear it. Verse 5: "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people... and when he opened it all the people stood up." Standing was the Old Testament saints' way of honoring the Word of Jehovah God. They stood as one would stand when a dignitary walks into the room. Third, we ought to desire it with all that is in us. Notice verse 1 of Nehemiah 8. The people gathered as one man, "and they spake to Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses." They did not wait for Ezra to bring God's Word out. They wanted to hear what God had to say to them, so they went to Ezra and said, "Go up to that pulpit and declare to us the Word of the Lord!" Fourth, we ought to take great joy when the Spirit works in us to hear and understand that Word with minds and hearts. Verse 12: "And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them." 

ALL AROUND US

REV. CLAY SPRONK

■ Unbelief Disguised As Holy Hesitancy

Two writers in the March issue of the *Banner*, one the editor of the magazine, the other a former Calvin Seminary professor, continue to work at demolishing the Christian Reformed Church. I am not quite sure which analogy to use to describe their destructive work. One could say they are swinging the wrecking ball one

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more time. But by now it could be argued the wrecking ball has done its work in the CRC. It might be better to say they have lit the match. But I won't quibble with anyone who prefers to argue the fire is already blazing and these writers are adding fuel to the fire. The sad fact is that the destruction of the Christian Reformed Church continues.

The two articles complement each other and work in concert to wreak further havoc in the CRC. Bob De Moor wrote his editorial, *Don't Be So Sure*, to

recommend Clarence Vos' article, *Holy Hesitancy*. Both articles promote the toleration of doctrinal differences. De Moor encourages his readers to "[leave] lots of room for each other on 'disputable matters.'" Vos begins his article by admitting that he dislikes doctrine. After the opening line of his article—"We must be more dogmatic (so that we may pontificate more appropriately)"—he writes, "If you dislike the topic as I have stated it, we're probably good friends." However, the point of Vos' article is not to disparage doctrine but rather to encourage toleration of different doctrinal beliefs. There should be unity despite doctrinal differences. For example, the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper differs from the Lutheran view. "What is important," Vos writes, "is whether Lutherans and Calvinists can celebrate the Supper together today." He envisions widespread unity through the toleration of doctrinal differences. "This will enable denominations to extend sincere greetings of love and goodwill to one another—allowing the church to serve humanity and reflecting its oneness in Christ."

Calling, as they do, for the toleration of different beliefs, it is not surprising that the two writers employ a positive and winsome tone. After all, how can they possibly be *so sure* that their belief that tolerating doctrinal differences is better than not tolerating doctrinal differences. One might think that the writers are willing to tolerate those who do not agree with the thesis of their articles.

But it is clear that the writers cannot tolerate those who demand the precise definition of right doctrine and strict condemnation of false doctrine. De Moor writes, "We don't grow when everything remains rigidly nailed down." This is a serious charge! Preventing the spiritual growth of believers is wicked—such is the wickedness laid at the feet of those who demand doctrinal precision. For Vos, tolerating doctrinal difference is loving. Those who do not tolerate doctrinal differences are guilty of sinful hatred and arrogance. This is the implication of his assertion that "[the] church must be prophetic, but it must be prophetic with self-denying love instead of with arrogant declarations." Vos' title indicates that tolerating a variety of doctrines is "holy," implying of course that denouncing the beliefs of others is unholy.

Why is toleration of false doctrine necessary? One reason, according to both writers, is that Scripture is not clear. De Moor denies the clarity (perspicuity) of the mysteries revealed in Scripture. De Moor does not speak of mysteries as truths the believing man is unable to know naturally but does know because God has revealed them in Scripture. No, a mystery is something "we admit we cannot understand.... Biblically, a mystery is not something that gets solved by human deduction as in a dime-store novel." Such biblical mysteries that we cannot understand include "creation, incarnation, justification, and sanctification." That these are mysteries means, according to De Moor, that we should not "rigidly nail down" what we believe about these doctrines but allow for differences. De Moor explains, for example, that creation is such a mystery that no one can know for sure how long it took God to create. There are different interpretations of the passages that speak of creation, and De Moor asks, "But why would we imagine that our personal *interpretation* of those is infallible?" He does not state that Scripture is unclear, but that is what he implies when he writes, "The mystery is just too high."

Vos also argues that Scripture is not clear. His argument is based on a redefinition of the word "dogma." Vos does not like the definition of the word dogma as the word is used in the church today. Because the word can be used in different ways, it would have helped if Vos would have given the definition of dogma that he rejects. Usually the word is used to refer to a teaching of Scripture officially adopted by the church and set forth in the confessions. In other words a dogma is a truth the church is so sure about that she binds it upon her members to confess that truth and to reject all errors that militate against it. Vos is surely opposed to such a definition of the word. He argues that in the early church "dogma was used in connection with statements that expressed what *seems or appears* to be." Vos, perhaps because he dislikes doctrinal precision, does not set forth precisely how he wants the word to be defined. My guess is that he views a *dogma* as *what Scripture seems to mean*.

Having redefined the word dogma, Vos explains that the meaning of Scripture is unclear. Scripture is clear, he argues, when it gives commands such as "repent"

or “believe.” But he writes, “By contrast, the *dogmas* were not so clear—precisely how Christians were to understand repentance and faith was not self-evident. Exactly what believing involved was not absolutely clear.” So a dogma is an unclear teaching of Scripture.

Believing that Scripture is unclear, Vos argues that dogmas are “private.” That is, each individual is entitled to interpret the meaning of Scripture according to his own understanding. How does this work itself out? Vos is saying something like this: *All Christians have to agree that Scripture commands sinners to believe in Jesus Christ. But Scripture is not clear about what it means to believe in Jesus Christ. Therefore, individuals are left to interpret the meaning of believing in Jesus Christ for themselves. No individual should conclude that his interpretation is the clear meaning of Scripture or that it should be publicly embraced by the whole church. Rather, each individual should recognize his interpretation as his “private” belief and tolerate the “private” beliefs of others. This toleration is necessary for each individual. Since Scripture is unclear, it just may be that we will find out in heaven that “my” interpretation was wrong and “his” interpretation was correct.*

There are *many* problems with what De Moor and Vos are proposing.

First of all, their arguments lack necessary proof. De Moor does not prove that a mystery in Scripture is something that cannot be understood, he simply assumes it. He does not prove, but assumes, that the Bible does not clearly teach that the days of the creation week were ordinary days. Vos also makes many assumptions. He assumes, without giving a shred of evidence, that the early church fathers tolerated different beliefs about key doctrines such as faith. It would be easy to prove that the early church fathers were not nearly as tolerant of doctrinal differences as Vos suggests. But if Vos wants to prove that the early church was doctrinally indifferent, the burden of proof is on him. Also, Vos does not really prove there is anything wrong with the definition of a dogma as a teaching of Scripture that is officially adopted by the church and set forth in her confessions. He simply assumes his redefinition is better and runs with it.

Although De Moor and Vos are clamoring for doctrinal toleration of many beliefs, they are actually attacking the truth. By denying the possibility of doctrinal certainty, they have thrown a match on the Reformed confessions. De Moor and Vos know that Reformed churches have confessions and that these confessions interpret Scripture. The Reformed confessions do not merely tell us that God speaks of the subjects of creation, incarnation, justification, and sanctification. The Reformed confessions set forth what Scripture teaches about these subjects. The Reformed confessions are based on the principle that Scripture is clear and understandable. Therefore, the Reformed confessions boldly declare what Scripture teaches about creation, incarnation, justification, and sanctification. The Reformed confessions bind Reformed believers to confess what they teach and to reject doctrines that differ from what they teach. De Moor and Vos know these things about the confessions and are deliberately attacking them. Their attack is deadly.

Ultimately, De Moor and Vos are inviting all kinds of false doctrine into the CRC. When I was yet a member of the CRC in the 1990s, I was appalled that the denomination allowed for different interpretations of Scripture regarding women in office. That was nothing compared to what De Moor and Vos are now advocating. If Scripture is not clear on what incarnation, justification, and sanctification mean, and the CRC must tolerate different interpretations, the prospects are frightening. The CRC will have to tolerate the belief that Jesus was only a man; that justification in some way is based on the works of man; that the biblical standard of sanctification does not condemn homosexuality. This will lead to the loss of the gospel of salvation. If Christ is only a man, there is no salvation! If justification depends on works in any way, there is no salvation! There is no assurance of salvation for those who believe such doctrines. This will also lead to rampant ungodliness in the CRC. If sanctification can be tampered with and people can individually determine what the Bible teaches about holiness, then doors are opened to a situation in which every man does that which is right in his own eyes.

Of course, this is only a small sampling of the errors De Moor and Vos are inviting. What about the doctrine of the Trinity? The Bible does not even use

the *word* Trinity. Can we really be so sure about this doctrine? To be consistent, De Moor and Vos must tolerate the Mormon interpretation of Scripture that there is more than one God and the Jehovah's Witness interpretation of Scripture that only God the Father is God and not the Son or the Holy Spirit.

The doctrinal tolerance promoted by De Moor and Vos is not humility. It is not "holy hesitancy." It is a pernicious, unholy, damnable attack on the truth. Their attitude toward the truth is not of God but of the devil.

Those who know the truth in the CRC must leave. When God used Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument to destroy the apostate nation of Judah in 586 BC, there was nowhere else for the people of God to go. That is not the case today. While the CRC is setting aside the truth of God set forth in the Reformed confessions for false doctrine, there are yet churches that are doctrin-

ally sound. Staying in the CRC is as foolish as staying in a house that is burning when there is opportunity to run across the street to a safe house. It is bewildering and grievous—after all these years and all the decay in the CRC, and it has only gotten worse and worse—that there are yet those who will not leave.

Why should members of the Protestant Reformed Churches take note of deadly doctrinal tolerance in the CRC? Definitely not so that we will be proud and think that we are better. The fall of the CRC, as was true of the fall of Judah, is a warning to us. It can happen to us if we lose our love for God and His truth. We also need to beware that this is what our young people will face if they attend a college affiliated with the CRC. They will be taught that it is humble and good and holy to tolerate doctrinal differences. They need to be prepared. ☺

The Second Isaianic Woe!

Lust of Wealth

The first *Woe unto you!* turned itself against the ever ground-gaining pursuit after wealth, goods, and money, against the insatiable lust of adding house to house and joining field to field.

Thus not merely against *money-wolves*; but against the love of money, which increased hand over hand among our people, and finally infected the most godly.

Consider well, it is always God's people against which these bitter *Woes!* are pronounced. Always after the rule of our poet Bilderdyk: "When on account of sin a people must perish, in church begins the soul's corruption."

Listen further to the second *Woe!* of Isaiah, not this

time against the slavery of money, but against *wealth* and *wantonness* that comes from it.

Woe unto them, so speaks the seer of the Lord:

Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night, till wine inflame them! and the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands (Is. 5:11, 12).

This second stage of a people's degeneration and the moral decadence of a nation does not begin with evil intent, but is the unavoidable and the of-itself-following result of too great an accumulation of money and the large growth of fortunes.

For the man himself who accumulated the money is as a rule more saving than extravagant, and still holds himself to the simple manner of life in which he had his

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early bringing up and training. But when he dies, and the money comes into the hands of his children, it takes in most cases the opposite course.

They do not know their father's attachment to money; but their desire and longing goads them on to enjoy that money.

In that money there is magical power.

That money will buy worlds of sensual pleasures and delights.

And that hidden virtue of money is what they want out of it. Their father accumulated it, but they, his children, must bring the value of it into evidence.

Then simplicity departs, wealth begins to practice its enchantment, and wantonness is the ash that remains of the charred wealth.



So it was in Egypt and Babylon, so it was in Samaria and Damascus, so it went on in Athens and in Rome; and so, to come nearer home, the Netherlands declined, when reviving from the struggle for freedom against Spain, the treasures of East and West were poured into our laps, and as a consequence, asking after *God* became ever less and asking after *gold* ever more insistent.

For then in our land also upon Mammon followed wealth, and after wealth came wantonness, until in the second half of the last century, in our stately houses and old-fashioned country places, life became one not of honor but of shame, to which God has brought an end by letting the French carry away our treasures from us, and by sending Napoleon to us as our scourge.

And now you see the same process again.

Especially in the latter part of this century, money has become plentiful again, and even now, before the century is ended, you see wealth increase again hand over hand, and wantonness follow after in wild drinking-bouts and in a sort of theater exhibitions and books that make mockery of all chastity and shame.

*...in the public market of life
the serious life-tone of sobriety
must more and more
lower the flag before the din of
sensual pleasure.*

Understand well, that this is not said because here and there you find a single excessive plutocrat, or a few conscienceless debauchees.

Such disgraceful characters have always and everywhere been known. This, however, does not destroy the nation, so long as the public conscience still reacts and protests resiliently against it.

No, what is avenged, and against which the *Woe unto you!* goes forth from the Lord of hosts, is when that wealth infects the nation itself in its broader circles, including even the followers of the Lord, and in the public market of life the serious life-tone of sobriety must more and more lower the flag before the din of sensual pleasure.

Then, among all ranks and stations, play and recreation become the sole object at which one aims, the booty of every chase.

Then the people have entered upon the *second* stage of their corruption. And against this second form of corruption is sounded once again, reproaching and recalling, the penitential trumpet of the second *Woe unto you!*



This corruption can only be arrested in its course, either by the judgment that God sends forth and turns

riches into poverty, or by the preaching of the Word that loudly sounds the penitential trumpet, arrests people in their wild course, and from heathen morals that creep in calls them back to a quiet, domestic life as becomes Christians.

Improvement does not come from so-called "ennobling of public entertainments," and still less from vain attempts to

exalt the Stage by fine art.

All this sort of means is nothing more than so much mortar, with which one plasters over the crack in the wall of national life to hide the approaching corruption from sight.

A people thus sliding down the incline can no more save itself. For this, in its wealth-weakened system, it lacks courage and elasticity.

It groans under the mode, and as slave of the same it must run along and follow when wealth passes by on the road.

No, salvation of a people lies in that heart of the nation alone that maintains the faithfulnesses, and still trembles at the Word, and holds itself fast by its God.

Jesus Himself testifies: only in that kernel is *the salt* that can avert corruption.

Not because as people they are so much better than others, but because *the Word* still has a hold on them, and God's Holy Spirit is still at work in them.



But this arrest is not brought to effect, save as the power of the Word reveals itself in the *households*.

Faithful church attendance becomes an empty show, when from church the mind of the Lord is not conveyed to *the home*.

Therefore it is so beautifully significant that God teaches His people to *give*, exercises them ever more and more in the practice of *giving*, makes them give ever more richly and more generously and more abundantly because, by that giving, just so much money goes out from the purse, and thereby so much fuel from the furnace of wealth.

He who gives generously and bountifully to the cause of God in the world does not have much left for luxuries, and he holds himself aloof thereby from those companies and associations in which wantonness keeps the bells of the fool's cap ringing.

The sounding of this penitential trumpet in the preaching of the Word must direct itself therefore to two things in particular: first, *much and always yet more giving*, and again separation from the world in which wealth and wantonness strike the keynote.

The old and tried wisdom of life on the part of all sober-minded Christians to resist gambling, dance, and theater as inimical powers that stand over against the honor of God's people. To give the Sabbath to God and not to the world. And in civic virtue and quiet simplicity to seek real delight of life.

A wisdom of life, which even yet will stand the test of fire, provided father and mother are not so egotistical as to think: If I but control myself, all is well.

No, especially to the children and to the rising generation must the discipline of life be applied.

For a stigma in the congregation of the Lord are those evil households where father and mother truly reverence bit and bridle, but in which the children are left to grow up wild, counting their baptism as nothing, allowing them to reach maturity not as children of God, but as *children of the world*.



God's child also knows of wealth; but it is an altogether different wealth, *the wealth of soul*, when his heart can enjoy itself in the hidden walk, and in the fellowship of his God.

So it is written in that second *Woe unto you!*

A people that lets itself be carried off as prey by the wealth of the world "regard no more *the work of the Lord*, neither consider the operations of His hands."

When the artificial light of the world still blinds our eye, the glory of the firmament hides itself from us in the dark. So, when the wealth of the world has captured our heart, there dies away in us the taste and the sense for spiritual enjoyment, and we miss the eye to delight ourselves in considering the wonders of the Lord.

This is the righteous punishment that follows at the heel of the gleam of earthly wealth. It shuts you up in the world, and renders the skyline of the eternal, the horizon of the glory of our God, invisible.

So *gold* takes a people away from their God, and earthly wealth removes them from God's glory.

They sink away ever deeper. They become ever more obtuse. They lose ever more the gold-dust from their wings!

And so they must either be brought to a stand that they might convert themselves to the living God, or with ever quickening strides they hasten on to judgment in perdition.

A *Woe unto you!* is no complaint, and no mere warning.

When God pronounces His *Woe unto you!* upon a people, that *Woe unto you!* itself is the bolt of lightning wherewith presently He sets that people on fire. ☞

Upon This Rock (11)

Robbing Christ of His Honor (3)

We left Adam and Eve, last time, clothed in the fig leaves they had sewed together to cover their nakedness—their nakedness, that is, before *God*. The deepest cause of their fear and of their shame (cf. Gen. 3:11) came from their awareness of their guilt and of the corruption of their natures. Yes, the corruption of their natures. They could *feel* it. They did not have to be *told* that by their disobedience and fall they had rendered themselves unfit for fellowship with the holy God. They did not have to be *told* that, standing with their sinful selves uncovered before His pure eyes, they needed a *covering*. And they knew, too, instinctively as it were, that fig leaves left them...exposed. Hence their hiding on hearing the voice of God, walking in the garden.

What was the one great, all-encompassing need of our first parents in this hour? The gospel.

That's what was proclaimed to them.

We see it. Did *they*? That, you will remember, is the question we are facing in this short series.

The word of God as it is recorded for us in Genesis 3:15 is often called the mother promise, or the protevangel. It is called that, according to Rev. Hoeksema, "because it is the beginning of the gospel of salvation; and all the rest of the revelation of the gospel in Christ may be conceived as only a further unfolding and expansion of the promise." The idea here is that it is not at all true that Adam and Eve had only *part* of a promise that God chose to reveal bit by bit throughout the centuries of the old dispensation. What Adam and Eve had can rather be described as an "embryo" or "seed," which had in it "all the promises thereafter spoken through the centuries of the formation of the Canon

of the Scriptures" (Rev. Ophoff). "I will put enmity..." the Lord said. And, further, "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." It's all there, is it not? Perpetual warfare there will be, says God, between the reprobated portion of fallen humanity, of which Satan is the prince, and the elect of God. But the victory belongs to the latter. Satan will eventually lay hold on the seed Himself, but the wound he will inflict, though a grievous one indeed, will not be fatal. The seed of the woman, said God to Satan in the hearing of Adam and Eve, will crush the head of the serpent.

Did Adam and Eve, did the saints of the old dispensation, understand these mysterious words? Says Rev. Ophoff, "The divine announcement, 'I will set enmity,' and 'It shall bruise thy head' was, we may feel assured, heavenly music in the ears of every saint of the old covenant. This and similar announcements must be regarded as so many lifelines, thrown out, which those who realized that they were lying in the midst of death, eagerly grasped." But was the gospel of the protevangel clear to the minds of Adam and Eve? That is, did they know the answers to such questions as these: Who are the two seeds of whom God spoke? What is the character of the enmity that God will put between them? How will the crushing of the serpent's head be accomplished? And how will all of this effect...our *salvation*?

Rev. Ophoff says concerning questions of this kind that "the protevangel itself does not supply the answers." He concluded in fact that, "if there had not been any subsequent revelations, no unfolding of the promise of the protevangel, these questions would forever have remained unanswered." That the protevangel was a promise of victory, and that there was in it the hope of deliverance from the death that they so richly deserved, this much Adam and Eve must have understood. But in order for God's people to come to a fuller understand-

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ing of *how* their salvation was to be realized, further light needed to be shed on the promise of God as it was given to Adam. And that light was indeed given—not only by further prophecies, but by all of the types and shadows that were to become part of what might be called the “history of revelation.” Beginning right here, in Paradise I, after the Fall.

From the moment that their eyes were opened to their sin, they had felt the necessity of a covering. And that conviction very likely remained, even after they heard the promise of a Redeemer. But what to cover themselves with—that was the question, for they knew full well that the fig leaves were vain.

God did not leave them long wondering about that. Having proclaimed to them the gospel of grace He added at once a visible symbol to that gospel—by clothing Adam and Eve with coats of animal skins.

How God made those coats we are not told. We are inclined to agree with Prof. Hoeksema when he suggests that very likely God Himself *killed* that animal and *made* those clothes for Adam and Eve. Considering the Antitype (the reality that this transaction pictured), what could have been more fitting?

Whatever the case, whether by the hand of God or of Adam, the important thing is that animals did indeed *die*. In all likelihood Adam and Eve had never before witnessed the terrible reality of death. They had from the beginning been warned that death was the penalty for disobedience to God’s command; but of the nature and effects of it they must have had only a vague conception. And, says Jamieson, “what a shock must the feelings of the parents of our race have received—what an overwhelmingly painful impression must have been made on their hearts, when the first sacrifice was offered...when, with the recent memory of their guilty fall, they stood in mute astonishment at the spectacle of the immolated carcass, and beheld in it the effects of that death to which it was consigned as their substitute.”

Indeed, their substitute it was. That’s what God told them, right?

Well, not exactly. Here’s what we read: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.”

Hardly, however, is the ‘speculation’ of Jamieson here farfetched.

Not that all are agreed on this point. Keil and Delitzsch, for example, write that:

The notion, which is still very widely spread, that the burnt-offerings of Abel, Noah, and the patriarchs were expiatory sacrifices, in which the slaying of the sacrificial animals set forth the fact, that the sinner was deserving of death in the presence of the holy God, not only cannot be proved from the Scriptures, but is irreconcilable with the attitude of a Noah, an Abraham and other patriarchs, towards the Lord God.... There is no historical foundation for the arguments adduced... in support of the opinion, that there were sin-offerings before the Mosaic law.

Ophoff, though he makes no reference at this point to Keil and Delitzsch, or for that matter to any other Old Testament commentators, makes abundantly clear what he thinks of such reasoning. “We must consider further,” he writes, “that the sacrifice by blood was a symbol and type of greatest significance. It preindicated the atonement of Christ. As such it formed the very heart of Israel’s symbolical-typical worship. Can it be that the Genesis narrative contains no report of its revelation to Adam? We must again reply, this is inconceivable.”

Ophoff goes on then to assert that the Bible “is the progressive revelation of the truth of our salvation. How could it be this,” he asks, “if it contains no report of the first revelation of a symbolical-typical institution of such vast importance? The Genesis narrative,” he insists, “*must* contain such a report. And that report is the verse that tells us that the Lord clothed our first parents with skins.”

But then the question reasserts itself: Did *Adam and Eve* understand it? Could they understand the transaction—given what appears to be an absence of any explanation?

First of all, we must allow for the possibility that some words of explanation, though not recorded, may in fact have been spoken. But, second, we cannot help but think that very little information would have been *necessary*. Consider, again, what Adam and Eve had already learned—by *experience* and by *intuition* and by God’s having *opened their eyes*. They did not have to be *told* that their very nature had been corrupted in


consequence of their disobedience. They knew that the God with whom they had enjoyed blessed fellowship in the state of rectitude was “of purer eyes than to behold evil.” They knew that the depravity of their nature required a *covering*. And they understood at once the futility of their attempt to provide a covering of their own making. It is then, it would seem, but a small step to their comprehending also that God’s provision of skins was His answer to their felt need of a covering for the corruption of their natures. To what other conclusion could they have come—if, as we suggested before, the opening of their eyes (3:7) was evidence of an immediate operation of regenerating grace in the hearts of Adam and Eve?

And then but another small step to their comprehending the connection between their sin, the threatened consequence,...and that dead animal at their feet—slain by God, to provide a covering for *them*. Genesis 3:15 was gospel to Adam’s *ear*. Genesis 3:21 was gospel to his *eye*! Ophoff, we think, is exactly right

when he writes, in effect, that no visual aid could have been more perfect:

Now through what more appropriate doing could God have communicated to Adam the conception of the sacrifice by blood than through a doing according to which He shed animal blood in man’s presence and clothed him with skins of the victims? In connection with what more appropriate doing could God have revealed unto Adam the truth of which the sacrifice by blood is expressive? Fact is that the doing was as suitable and appropriate, as instructive and illuminating, as any doing could possibly be. Its appropriateness is unsurpassable. The agreement between the thing and the matter signified was perfect.

With confidence, therefore, we can conclude that the *symbolism* involved in the bloody sacrifice was not lost on our first parents. They *must* have understood it.

But, as noted above, Ophoff speaks repeatedly of that sacrifice as being both a symbol and a *type*. It remains, yet, for us to look at the latter. Next time. 

IN MEMORIAM

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

Pastor Lau Chin Kwee, 1951 to 2013

I first came to know Lau Chin Kwee in Singapore when I was called there to be a missionary to the Gospel Literature and Tract Society (GLTS). The GLTS was a vibrant group of mostly Chinese new Christians. Chin Kwee was already at that time a leader of the GLTS. He was instructing the group in the Heidelberg Catechism. Many of the members of GLTS were brilliant college and university students. God used the young brother Chin Kwee, at the time a school teacher, in very exciting days, to work towards the establishing of a new Reformed church in Singapore. Chin Kwee was used of the Lord to nourish and develop the newfound excitement in the GLTS for the glorious truths of God’s sovereign and particular saving grace. There was also immediate need to defend the

truth against opposition. Chin Kwee was able to face the challenges and give the necessary leadership.

Chin Kwee found the love of his life in a young girl named Lim Foong Ngee, whom he saw among the members of the GLTS. I was privileged to officiate at their wedding. Over the years God blessed their marriage with three children, Tabitha, Paul, and Given. The Laus then became an example of a Christian marriage and family in a pagan culture.

God greatly blessed the GLTS. Soon more than 100 young people were regularly attending meetings. A decision was made to send Chin Kwee to the USA for seminary training in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

In January of 1982, after a vigorous study of the Three Forms of Unity, the GLTS was instituted as a new church, adopting the name Evangelical Reformed

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Pastor Lau Chin Kwee

Church of Singapore (ERCS). The Three Forms of Unity were officially adopted as the confessional basis of the ERCS. After Chin Kwee's return from training in the USA, another joyful event took place, the ordination of the brother into the ministry in the ERCS. After his ordination, Pastor Lau served as a faithful minister of ERCS during the very first years of its existence. Pastor Lau was registered with the authorities officially to conduct the many marriages taking place among the youthful members of ERCS.

Years of joy and growth followed in which exciting events took place. A second congregation was organized. The two congregations were formed into a denomination. The new denomination was soon actively involved in its own mission work, especially in the country of Myanmar, but also with contacts in Malaysia. A small theological school had its birth, the Asian Reformed Theological School (ARTS). Many of us have fond memories of the tireless and devoted work of Pastor Chin Kwee in all of this history, in several capacities.

The new Reformed denomination soon faced challenges and sorrows. Struggles arose over distinctive truths of the Word of God that it had been taught, which led finally to the breakup of the denomination. One of the subjects of controversy was the truth of God's unbreakable bond of marriage. We are thankful

that Pastor Lau was a teacher and valiant defender of the truth during the times of controversy. The Protestant Reformed Churches of which I am minister are thankful to the Lord for the faithfulness of Pastor Lau. He took his stand with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church when the denomination was dissolved.

For a long time Pastor Lau struggled with a genetic disease that caused his health to deteriorate very seriously. A major operation was performed about four years ago involving a double organ transplant (heart and liver), in hopes of extending the life of Pastor Lau. This was the first such operation ever to be performed in Singapore. Everyone hoped and prayed that it would improve the quality of life of Pastor Lau. However, after the operation Pastor Lau faced a long and valiant struggle with his health, including many treatments and repeated hospitalizations. He was no longer able to serve as full-time pastor. However, even with grievous sickness and many physical limitations, Pastor Lau continued by the grace of God to minister to the saints. In the years of suffering, Pastor Lau was an example of a saint of God who was able to endure great suffering and trials, remaining by the grace of God steadfast in the faith. On March 31, 2013 he was taken home to glory.

The undersigned is very thankful to have been given the opportunity to travel to Singapore to be part of the funeral services of Pastor Lau. These services included three evenings of funeral 'wakes.' At the wakes and the funeral service hundreds of people came to express their sympathies and thankful remembrances of Pastor Lau's years of ministry. The many who attended the wakes were evidences of all the lives that had been touched in wonderful ways through this servant of the Lord.

We all sorrow because of the loss of a dear brother and faithful servant of the Lord. But we also rejoice to know that Pastor Lau is now in the presence of the Lord whom He served faithfully. At the funeral service I preached on the encouraging final words of the inspired apostle Paul recorded in II Timothy 4: 7 and 8: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge will give me in that day." Appropriate words, we think, to summarize also the ministry of the late Pastor Lau Chin Kwee. ❧

The God Delusion, Richard Dawkins. Bantam Books, 2006. ISBN: 0-618-6800. [Reviewed by Jeff Kalsbeek.]

Richard Dawkins grew up in the Anglican Church of England. Both of his parents were scientists, and he too became interested in science, getting a degree in zoology. He became assistant professor at the University of California, Berkley and later taught at the University of Oxford, England. He is a proponent of the theory of evolution and a self-proclaimed atheist. He has authored a number of books regarding evolution in biology and genetics.

Though this is not a new book, I review it due to the pertinent nature of Dawkins' assertions, which are being readily accepted as never before. Dawkins' prediction is coming true before his eyes. Atheism is going mainstream in important ways.

Richard Dawkins' purpose with this book is to convince readers that belief in a deity is the product of an ignorant mind and a backward culture that humans have not properly shed from themselves because of thousands of years reinforcing. Dawkins uses the knowledge of science and the examples of religious tyranny to prove his point. This also serves to make his other point, that Atheism is not as revolting as society has traditionally made it out to be, but makes for invigorated, balanced members of society.

The book begins by distinguishing between Albert Einstein's metaphoric god, which Dawkins has no quarrel with, and belief in a supernatural deity, which is his target in the book. Since Dawkins' determinations are always based on evolution, he builds the case that God is a hypothesis. He does not distinguish between deities, but lumps all together. The god of heathen idol worshipers is the same god that the Muslim, the Roman Catholic, and the Reformed believer worship. This makes "God" an easy target to disparage. Dawkins

traces a history of God beliefs and numerous arguments for God's existence and makes them look foolish. At one point he uses 18 different words to characterize, blasphemously, the Old Testament God, in order to show that He is a fictional figure, unable to be taken seriously.

Dawkins next compares Natural Selection to Intelligent Design. He makes the argument that Natural Selection promotes full growth of the mind, whereas Intelligent Design encourages a lazy, defeatist attitude for dealing with something that one does not completely understand. He then uses his knowledge of biology and chemistry to prove, in lengthy discussions, that there cannot be a God. In this section, Dawkins' arguments are quite intriguing, it being obvious that he has much knowledge in the sciences.

After sufficiently showing that God does not exist, Dawkins seeks to answer the question why so many people evolved with a religious bent. He explains how genetic drift and gene mutation caused the persistence of this irrational behavior. Also, in his section on Memes, he explains how they survive through generations by conferring some advantage or being compatible. Those schooled in these areas would find his explanations especially interesting. Before reading this, I had not imagined that someone could use the sciences to such an extent in an attempt to disprove God.

Dawkins maintains that religion survives only by keeping its followers ignorant. He quotes Martin Luther, taking him out of context in the process, who said, "*Reason should be destroyed in all Christians.*" At this point in the book it became clear that Dawkins' god is his brilliant mind. He really believes that there are no depths that the mind of man cannot uncover, and a deity above man is unthinkable. Ironically, Dawkins, in this chapter, demonstrates what it means to be self-deceived.

Next, the area of morals is explored. It is maintained that morality doesn't arise from the Bible or religion, but has evolved in all humans. This point is driven home by examples of Christian immorality, case studies done on

Mr. Kalsbeek is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

the issue, and the Bible's "obnoxious" system of morals. Morals, Dawkins insists, continue to change despite religion, not because of it. Dawkins points to the evils of false religion, and sinful hypocrisy within religions, as proof that it is all a farce and there is no supernatural God. He quotes Steven Weinberg:

Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it you'd have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, it takes religion.

Examples are not hard to find. From Muslim terrorism, to money-fleecing televangelists and from Inca child-sacrificing to numerous acts of hatred inflicted on others by professed Christians. Atheism, on the other hand, is true enlightenment and thus more apt to be considerate of others.


The fact that religion, in many cases, is absolutism is the reason that it is so hostile, according to Dawkins. He seeks to show the mental torture caused by religion and the cruelty upon other people that it has encouraged throughout history. Not only the Taliban, but the religious right that seek a Christian state, promote violence. Again, Martin Luther is pointed to, and is said to have influenced Hitler's thoughts about the Jews. Not surprisingly, Dawkins doesn't mention the fact that the theory of evolution influenced multitudes to think of the Arian race as superiorly evolved, and to see other races as less than human. Dawkins repeatedly emphasizes that "religion is the root of all evil." He also maintains that even mild religion is evil because it provides the climate for extremism. This argument is an ominous one, in my judgment. Contrary to Dawkins' wishes, there will always be "religion" in the antichristian kingdom, but certain types of religious people will be considered a threat to peaceful society.

The section on the sanctity of human life shows how the majority of people can excuse the murder of unborn children. In evolution, humans are not to be granted a special status over other animals. Embryos do not have a nervous system, while a cow in a slaughterhouse does. Another point made is that religious people, while maintaining abortion as wrong, deem the killing of abortion doctors to be morally correct.

The book ends with Dawkins advocating, as he started, for "consciousness raising," so that society's children are not continually psychologically damaged (victimized) by religion, unable to escape its effects in later life. The only way to put a stop to this is to make children wards of the state and to forbid parents to "indoctrinate" their children.

Dawkins continually emphasizes that the educated and mature mind will reject God and religion as being a childish fairy tale. This is extremely effective since it plays on every human being's pride. No one wants to be labeled as being "backward." Interestingly, Dawkins points out that natural selection doesn't make sense to the young mind, but that evolutionary thought is dominant among the educated elite. This growing phenomenon is seen in how even "Christian" colleges have adopted evolution as the basis of their science curriculum. A *Grand Rapids Press* article quoted a professor of such a college as saying that most of the new students come into college believing creationism, but that professors "patiently deal" with such students until they see the light.

The parents and church that sinfully leave open the possibility that Genesis is not literal become guilty of leaving their children vulnerable. Such children have nothing to stand on when confronted with the "wise and prudent." Even parents who faithfully instruct from earliest years are not immune from having a child depart for atheism. A few years ago, perhaps, such a child would depart for a more liberal, "enlightened" church. Today, those "leaning on their own understanding" find it socially acceptable to make a complete break. No longer associated with devilry, Atheism is becoming a respected perspective.

Obviously, Richard Dawkins is not interested only in portraying religious people as ignoramuses, lower in the evolutionary process. He presents an agenda to rid this irritant from a developing society. His book is worth reading, for the awareness it brings to much that is going on in society today. 

Mission Activities

On March 29, the 3rd Annual Combined Church Outing was held in the Philippines. This year 100-plus members of the First Reformed Church of Bulacan, the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in Manila, and the Maranatha Reformed Church in Valenzuela attended.

Our missionaries there write that “they are thankful to God for the opportunity to further the unity and communion of saints between these groups. The outing was held at the Grotto Vista Resort in Bulacan, where there were good amenities for fellowship, games, swimming, and (of course) eating.” The outing began with singing and prayer, followed by a meditation given by Rev. Kleyn on Psalm 127:1. “Except the Lord build the house...” Rev. Kleyn applied this verse to the Christian home as well as to the on-going work of building Reformed churches and a denomination in the Philippines.

Looking at the pictures sent by our missionaries, one is somewhat envious of the warm weather, the sunshine, and the pool the group of saints in the Philippines are enjoying, when many of us are still watching snow piles melt. Rev. Smit did the closing devotions for this day on the first few verses of Psalm 118...being thankful for all God’s mercies.

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Congregation Activities

The Men’s Society of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA met April 10 to begin a discussion on “What the Book of Proverbs Teaches Fathers,” led by their pastor, Rev. Huizinga. Due to the amount of material in the book of Proverbs, and the emphasis of the opening chapters on a father speaking to his son, the men of Hope will limit their discussion to the first five chapters, which afford plenty of material.

If you read the “News” on a regular basis, then you already know that the Edgerton, MN PRC celebrated their anniversary as an organized congregation on April 11. What you may not know is that April 11, 2013 marked their 75th anniversary. We cannot let that occasion pass without extending to them our congratulations as well. Our brothers and sisters in Edgerton celebrated God’s faithfulness to them on Sunday, April 14 with a special worship service that evening when their pastor, Rev. Kuiper, preached from Revelation 2:10, under the theme, “Faithful unto Death.” This was followed by a program in their sanctuary and then lunch and fellowship. Edgerton also invited friends and family from the neighboring churches to join them on Saturday, April 20, for an evening of fun, food, and fellowship at the Edgerton Christian Elementary School. Plans called for a potluck supper, followed by a Bean Bag Tournament.

Sunday evening, April 14, the Hope PRC in Walker, MI installed

their new pastor, Rev. David Overway. Rev. Overway becomes the 12th pastor in their 97-year history. Prof. H. Hanko led the installation service, preaching on II Timothy 4:1-2, under the theme, “Preach the Word.” We should also add here that on that Sunday morning Hope’s congregation was invited to stay for coffee and cookies and a time of fellowship to mark the end of Prof. Cammenga’s and Prof. Hanko’s weekly preaching for them. These two servants of the church led services for some two and a half years during Hope’s vacancy.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL encouraged their congregation to promote actively their up-coming lecture on April 12 on “Bringing up Covenant Youth,” by inviting neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and coworkers on a personal basis. The subject was relevant in today’s age and needed by those in the world who are struggling to find ways to deal with their children. Rev. Spronk, pastor at Peace, was the speaker.

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Holland, MI sponsored a six-week Bible Study at the Holland Rescue Mission. This study began on Monday, April 15, with Mr. Rich Moore leading.

The Evangelism Committee of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI encouraged their congregation to check out the Sermonaudio.com website they are using to air 237 sermons. Since November 2011,

sermons have been downloaded 9,387 times, about 500 a month. In March, sermons were downloaded to 34 different states and 17 different countries. This has proved to be a very useful tool for Georgetown. It is free and safe to download as many sermons as you want. There is a link on Georgetown's website: just click, "Sermon Archive."

School Activities

Recent bulletins in our Iowa churches included this announcement, "Our schools, as we have them today, are dear to us. Yet they are not unique to the current generation. Rather, we stand in the heritage of reformers who have emphasized Reformed, Christian schools

for many generations. Prof. Dykstra has completed extensive research of the history of Christian schools and will be presenting a special chapel entitled, 'The Reformed Churches' Zeal for Christian Schools' at Trinity High School on Monday, April 8. We enthusiastically welcome everyone to join us as we learn about and delight in a history that we claim as our own." College students, grandparents, parents, and supporters were all invited.

All parents, alumni, and friends of Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA were invited to come to school on Wednesday, April 10 (and the Wednesdays following), at 2:00 P.M. for a softball game against the Junior High students.

The Loveland, CO PR Christian School invited their supporters to join them on April 12 for two lectures, one presented by Dr. Nate Lanning, entitled "Understanding Evolution: Reformed Consensus, Scientific Concepts and Physical Proof," and the other by Dr. Brendan Looyenga, titled "Teaching About Evolution and Evolutionists Within a Biblical Framework."

Minister Activities

The Randolph, WI PRC extended a call to Rev. R. Van Overloop to serve as their next pastor. Along with Rev. Van Overloop on the trio were the Revs. Bruinsma and Bleyenbergh. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ On May 18, 2013, our parents, **LES and MARY BARNHILL**, will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We thank God for their godly instruction and faithful walk. Our hearts overflow with gratitude when we consider Jehovah's faithfulness to them, and His faithfulness in their generations. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- ☺ Lisa and Pete Vandersloot
 - ☺ Dan and Kolleen Barnhill
 - ☺ Melinda and Aaron Knott
 - ☺ Tom and Kelly Barnhill
 - ☺ Ryan and Miranda Barnhill
- 10 grandchildren

Hudsonville, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Dan and Deb Kiel and to their children, Brad and Sarah Kiel, Bryan and Erika Kiel, Justin Kiel, and Alyssa Kiel in the death of Deb's mother,

DANA NYKAMP.

May they be comforted by God's Word: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Rev. Michael De Vries, President
Larry Moerman, Vice-All

Reminder:

■ The *Standard Bearer* is published only once a month in the months of June, July, and August.

Call to Synod!!

■ Synod 2012 appointed Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan the calling church for the 2013 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2013 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 11, 2013 at 8:30 A.M., in the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. Steven Key president of the 2012 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact the clerk of Hudsonville PRC: Mr. Ralph VanderVeen, 2973 Willow Run St., Hudsonville, MI 49428. Phone: (616) 669-5833. E-mail: ralph.vanderveen@sbcglobal.net.